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SUBJECT: PROGRAM UPDATE: NDI FOCUS GROUPS DISCUSS FATAH

REFORM

¶1. Summary: As part of its NEA/PI funded political party strengthening program, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) conducted focus groups with Fatah activists in Bethlehem and Nablus. Focus group participants evidenced continued interest and enthusiasm for reform of Fatah to enhance its viability as a political party and identified internal Fatah structures, the absence of youth outreach, and the development and selection of new leaders as Fatah,s greatest challenges. This cable is based upon the detailed minutes of each session. MEPI coordinator did not attend either focus group. End Summary

Focus Groups: Nablus, Bethlehem

¶2. On July 27 and August 4, NDI convened Fatah activist focus groups in Nablus and Bethlehem to discuss topics including: Fatah's challenges and opportunities; internal reform; Fatah relations with local communities; internal elections; and potential activities for the next year. There was no USG presence at either focus group, but MEPI coordinator reviewed detailed minutes of both sessions. The minutes indicate the following conclusions.

Fatah's Challenges: Too Many Committees, Too Little Vision

¶3. Fatah is still trying to evolve into a functioning political party: Activists want to see Fatah develop a clear political platform, hold internal elections to determine leadership, communicate more effectively (between the leadership and the base) and develop mechanisms to reach out to new members -- particularly young people -- and bring them into the movement. Focus group participants pointed to Fatah,s historical identity as the leadership of the Palestinian national resistance and drive for independence, but activists, especially in Nablus, criticized Fatah,s lack of a strategic vision. One participant said, "The last time the Fatah vision and mission were upgraded was in 1989." Activists also criticized Fatah,s numerous, overlapping organizational structures. One activist said, "There are in Nablus 33 institutions belonging to Fatah but there is no coordination among them."

¶4. Fatah is not ready for general elections: Activists in Bethlehem unanimously agreed that Fatah will not be ready for general elections until there are internal elections for party leaders. Nablus activists were hesitant to hold general elections for a number of reasons including the possible outcome and the situation in Gaza.

¶5. Fatah,s involvement in the PA led to increased corruption: One participant explained that Fatah signed agreements changing its platform from resisting to establishing a state. He said, "We transformed Fatah members into people only interested in having a job in the government

and getting a salary." Several activists in Bethlehem suggested that Fatah members should not be allowed to work in the PA.

¶16. Fatah is not interacting successfully on a local level: One Bethlehem activist said the people blame Fatah for Hamas winning the elections, and another said Fatah,s standing is bad, because of its performance in the PA and in the security apparatus. A third Bethlehem activist said Fatah,s popularity relative to Hamas is deteriorating, because the movement does not deliver benefits directly to the people. Nablus activists also criticized Fatah for "neglecting the masses."

Potential Fatah Program Ideas

¶17. The Bethlehem focus group participants mentioned the following program ideas: support for families of martyrs and prisoners, permanent youth centers, sports clubs, increasing women's involvement in Fatah, and supporting volunteerism.

¶18. The Nablus focus group participants suggested that Fatah: create projects based on community needs, target students through tutoring lessons, train Fatah members to reach out to potential new members, and enlist women activists to enter homes to speak with community members. They emphasized that Fatah must address the "security chaos."

DUFFY